

Statistical training and capacity building in data and information management in Pacific island countries and territories - activities undertaken by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community

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1. Number of countries SPC conducted statistical training during last 3 years through technical assistance or any type of cooperation

Serving a membership of 15 Pacific island countries and 7 territories (three each affiliated with the United States and France, and one with the United Kingdom), SPC has been providing statistical training and undertaking capacity building initiatives in data and information management in all Pacific island countries and all but one territory (Pitcairn island).

I am making this distinction as our efforts extend beyond attempts to enhance “traditional” statistical skills or activities more directly in the professional comfort zones of statisticians (statistical collection, processing, analysis, dissemination), and include concerted efforts in enhancing data utilization, through developing innovative means to facilitate the inclusion of statistical data and information in national policy development and planning efforts. Experience has shown over the years that without dedicated activities in this area, collecting and processing quality data and producing timely statistical outputs can be an exercise in futility, if intended users are unable to read, interpret and hence utilize this information. While this situation is most pronounced in the smaller national statistical offices and national statistical systems in our region, experience over the years with policy-makers and analysts in metropolitan countries and development agencies has taught us that functional numeracy skills, or more accurately, the lack thereof, do not have national or agency boundaries.

I like to emphasize that

- most statistical development support to the three US and French Pacific territories is provided by their metropolitan partner agencies (US Census Bureau, INSEE),
- the national statistical agencies of Australia and New Zealand also provide some bilateral assistance to specific island countries, and work with us in undertaking specific joint activities¹, with
- UNSD, UNESCAP and SIAP also providing much appreciated training assistance at regional-subregional levels.

2. Main fields of training

We provide formal, structured statistical training through national and sub-regional workshops, through professional attachments to statisticians and planners at our organization’s headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia, as well as via technical collaborative ventures in-country across the broad spectrum of statistical activities (Table 1).

Furthermore, Figure 1 illustrates the magnitude of training and capacity building provided by SPC’s Statistics and demography programme, with some 140 person weeks spent by SPC staff in-country, or managing professional attachments in Noumea, in 2007.

¹ Our collaboration with the ABS currently embraces the delivery of national project planning/management training; joint activities with Statistics New Zealand has involved recent collaboration with in census planning and analysis in some island countries.

Table 1: Statistical training provided by SPC

Type of training provided	National focus	Sub-regional/regional
<p>Generalized Statistical Training</p>	<p>Survey Operations and Procedures Introduce the principles of statistical survey taking; design and develop data collection instruments; undertake statistical surveys; enable development of basic computing skills</p> <p>Data analysis and report writing Teach fundamental methods of data analysis; conduct analysis of official datasets; provide opportunity to write a statistical report; enable development of advanced computing skills.</p> <p>Project planning/project team management Use upcoming national census or household survey as tangible goal to introduce NSO/NSS staff to project planning/management principles.</p>	<p>General Statistics In collaboration with SIAP; focus on planning of statistical activities; and introduction to demographic, social, economic statistics and survey design project planning (since 2004).</p>
<p>More specific training</p>	<p>National data user workshops After completion of census and household surveys: emphasis on getting data and information out to intended users</p> <p>Policy analysis Train policy analysts/planners in searching for/extracting/interpreting sectoral statistical data.</p> <p>Introduction to geographical information systems Train statisticians in use of GIS for effective spatial data dissemination; train policy analysts/planners in spatial interrogation (and interpretation) of demographic and socio-economic databases.</p>	<p>Population projections</p> <p>Web-publishing on PRISM SPC's Pacific Regional Information System.</p> <p>Technical workshops co-organised with UNSD, UNESCAP (<i>ad hoc</i>)</p>
<p>Technical collaboration</p>	<p>Planning of national censuses and household surveys</p> <p>Census analysis Including demographic analysis and compilation of national projections</p> <p>Analysis of Household surveys HIES, DHS</p> <p>Manage/maintain NSO websites</p> <p>Production of "statistical" outputs Analytical reports, statistical tabulations, posters, population atlases, national policy documents.</p>	<p>Noumea-based professional attachments Potentially covering all joint analytical activities; usually of between 2-4 weeks duration.</p>

September 2007. This also allows us to develop commensurate funding proposals. Toward the end of each year, our membership also provides us with an update on priorities for the coming year.

4. Funding for statistical training

Funding is available from different sources.

We currently have a staff contingent of 11 professional and 2 programme support staff, funded by SPC core budget (2), programme budget (7) and project funding (4). While project funding always entails designated funds for training/capacity building (current regional census project, DHS pilot programme; outgoing regional HIES program), most of our training is funded through a combination of SPC programme funds, or specific training/HR projects, such as our current collaboration with ABS on delivering training in project planning/project team management, and our annual sub-regional introductory workshops to general statistics co-hosted with SIAP.

5. Strategies for cooperation and partnership arrangements

Section 3 referred to our triennial governance meetings which help us develop 3-year work plans, which are also guided by SPC's corporate and SDP strategic plans, as well as by countries national sustainable development plans, and where available, national statistical master plans. This forms the basis for regular consultations with our main development partners, and for developing multi-year funding proposals.

6. Assessment of efficiency/effectiveness of statistical training

This comprises of various forms. Traditionally, it is based on formal workshop evaluations we are required to undertake for all national and sub-regional workshops, comprising of structured evaluation forms, requesting workshop participants' anonymous feedback on training content, structure and delivery.

With the current collaborative venture with the ABS, a formal training evaluation comprises of a brief country visit some 6-9 months after delivery of the training, to ascertain the extent to which training translated into tangible deliverables, as evident from detailed project plans, and the effective and efficient delivery of project outcomes. This involves interviews with training participants, their colleagues and supervisors, collaborating agencies, as well as comparing specific project outputs (survey coverage; cost stayed within budget) with other countries where such activities have not (yet) taken place.

We also organize external evaluations, when project activities extend either into a new phase (PopGIS; regional DHS pilot), and/or where we/donor agencies specifically look for/request independent advice.

7. Consideration of regional/country-specific factors in delivery of statistical training

As stated in sections 3 and 5, our overall strategic priorities are developed in consultation with our membership. Whether or not specific training activities are delivered at a national, or regional-sub-regional level, is largely determined by the nature of the specific activity. In general terms, country-specific training allows for broader coverage, whereas more specific technical training (e.g. population projections; demographic analysis) is more efficiently done at sub-regional level, considering that in most NSOs, technical specialist are rare. Having said this, it has been our experience over the years, that in terms of overall dedication/ concentration on training, sub-regional workshops achieve better results, with absenteeism virtually non-existent with participants able to concentrate full-time on training.

8. Dedicated agency website on past, current, proposed training activities to share lessons learned, experiences, increase coordination and avoid duplication/overlap

Currently we do not have such a facility in place.

Developing such a thematic folder on our website, however, should not prove too much of a challenge, as we provide a regular report for our membership on training activities undertaken. The most recent one, covering the period 2005 – 2007, is available on our website, in the folder pertaining to our most recent Regional Heads of Planning and Heads of Statistics meeting (www.spc.int/sdp).

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